Winterfat Presse

Winterfat
Manifesto

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"In a package of minutes there is this We."

— Gwendolyn Brooks

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ABOUT WINTERFAT

Winterfat Presse is a feminist poetry collective, reading room, and publication that celebrates the body in all of its revolutions and uprisings, of which there are many. We believe in the power of live spoken-word events to invite the unpredictable exchange of voices—an exchange that poetically challenges our predispositions and opens new perspectives. A return to the body, by hearing oneself speak behind a microphone; the literal amplification of one's voice into a space of intentioned open ears. Winterfat is a space where self-expression is held, legitimized, and accessible. Winterfat is deeply inspired by political and literary spaces in Berlin and elsewhere that treat poetry as a vessel for resistance. What the empire attempts to take first is our soul, so that we may feel too shrouded and disbelieving to even fight for it. Our space is sanctified for self-expression and the witnessing of it. Our reading rooms always feature a selected author whose work explores resistance through its embodied poetics.

Poetry comes from the very depths of our being. It is abstract, it is an answer and a question in itself. Living in poetics means a commitment to self-experience and self-translation. Often, we are compelled by external forces to attempt to justify our existence in this world, but when poetry makes an appearance, the very act of writing it renders us whole, here, entire. We must turn to poetry when we feel that the compass in our chest is spinning rampant, uncertain, and misled. Poetry is alive for when we need to hear what our soul is saying to us, sometimes deeply buried, and always throbbing; an entity in each and every one of us. When we speak of how writing, and the act of writing poetry in particular, has a power that grants permission to return to our personal sensibilities and to resist oppressive structures and empires in a more honest and sustainable way, we mean that, above anything, Winterfat Presse is a home for any and all writers—and for people who do not consider themselves poets, all the same—to make themselves material and believable, someone to be fought for, through spoken word and printed material.

Winterfat Presse helms poetry and performance that explores the body and repurposes what has been done with it. Winterfat approaches our reading room and literary magazine as opportunities to restore dignity and trust within the self. Activism is love work, and embodiment is nonnegotiable in true change. We attempt to make an active archive of literary resistance through honoring dissident poets and narratives that celebrate selfhood and embodiment. Our goal is to build a physical space that upkeeps said dissident narratives and actively archives poetic legacies of resistance through re-experience of their power and language, through curated prompts analyzing each writer's work. If we are to identify the semblance and soul of a particular author, and then prompt a writer to recreate their particular mode of embodiment, we are able to keep their dream and livelihood alive.

An embodied environment can represent and mean many things. A 'physical space' to practice intuition, to exercise it, similar to how we develop strength in our bodies. At Winterfat Presse, we apply methodologies that aim to: create an environment for reconnecting with the body, make sense of personal and political experiences, and provide a platform for the two to coexist and engage in dialogue—with the hope that this inspiration, once internalized, can translate into political and community action. Initially, a reading room is organized through sending invitations and community outreach. Readers who match the selected theme are found through word of mouth or printed invitation (on the street, train, at the corner store)—most of our readers are discovered by intuitive recognition of their poetic spirit, out in the world. Once the reading room has its contents, its container must be created. We identify four crucial elements that maintain, sustain, and create said embodied environments: stage design, visual art and handheld print materials, community outreach, and facilitators/event hosts.

Our name, Winterfat Presse, comes from the plant *Krascheninnikovia lanata*, which provides forage for desert wildlife in winter and fall seasons, when all other nourishment has been killed by the climate. Winterfat Presse's mother chapter is based in New York City, preceding our collective in Berlin. Both are separate but concurrent, always organizing around and celebrating the themes of intuitive resistance, poetic embodiment, and self-realization through language and performance.

STAGE DESIGN AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A stage should bring dignity to the performer, first and foremost. To set the stage is to set the tone of how serious and sincere our reasoning is to gather, and also to invite held silence for individuals to have moments of self-experience. The stage is a circumstance where a voice is being featured, and spoken word requires immense vulnerability; the environment should be designed to uplift the performer to help them maintain connection and reciprocity with the audience. A stage should be easily adaptable to various venues. Whether it is crafted dynamically to adjust to each performer is also an element that contributes to how embodied an experience both the performer and audience have. Each Winterfat set is unique to the selected venue and includes adjustable elements for each performer.

Algorithms learn our preferences and make it effortless to consume what we already like. Over time, this narrows our exposure because it filters out differences and reduces cross-pollination, ultimately conditioning taste to align with current ephemera and political and social narratives. In contrast, open mic events already function as environments that foster spontaneous exchange between strangers. They create conditions for audiences to be exposed to unfiltered voices, encouraging emotional resonance and chance connection beyond algorithmic connection. Learning to tolerate interpersonality outside of the echo chamber that is proposed as safety in a polarized political climate is integral to community building.

However, open mic and performance environments are often confined to existing establishments that remain inaccessible to many (restricted through paywalls or sole digital outreach). Financial barriers are one of the largest reasons we are not able to return to ourselves, find time to self-experience. We are expected to work and be milked of our energy for resistance. At Winterfat, we only ask for presence, listening ears, and openness. We are able to create an environment genuinely for all, irrespective of identity or socioeconomic status. By removing the financial barrier, this also invites the question of how the essential qualities of open mic environments can be distilled and made easier to host, lowering the barrier to participation while preserving live audience performer reciprocity and unpredictability. In turn, tolerance of different perspectives is built and strengthened.

Winterfat's primary goal is to create accessible spaces for embodiment, meaning, free or donation-based, always. If we are to maintain donation-based events, the venues we book must be free. We ensure this through local outreach, finding free venues with similar values through direct action and communication outside of digital spheres (i.e., walking around and speaking with owners; the venues themselves). By lowering the time and reliance on monetary limits, we liberate ourselves to serve a wider and changing community.

COMMUNITY DESIGN AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Alongside our creation of a custom, embodied space for expression, we also take on the task of assisting previously 'tidy' and 'afraid' writers into expansion. Many of our readers, if not all, are 'first timers' or those who do not consider themselves poets upon their initial glance inwards. By using the prompts our editors craft and being given specific language, our performers are able to tap into a more immaterial embodiment, beforehand foreign. There is not only one way that a 'poet' looks, speaks, or embodies themselves. It is often too broad a task to ask an individual who is perpetually uninspired to look inwards to do so without prompting or invitation. This practice of hearing our inner workings, which we could also call 'play,' 'making a mess,' is also composed of throwing off embarrassment, rejecting shame, finding our impulse and intuition, wringing and writing out all of our human pulp—holding ourselves in our hands.

Our reading rooms help dirtying their practices in the company of other desiring bodies, by building a space that invites uncertainty and teaches the skills to tolerate it. In this context, dirty means to 'make a mess.' Desire stretches beyond our earthly stratosphere; desires to be heard, witnessed, embodied, challenged, shine, and be shone upon. More than acting as the bridge between writers, our outreach staff beckon writers into a closer relationship with their immaterial selves, providing the nudge that may transform hobby journaling or structured poetry-writing into intuitive moments that produce full-blown ribbons of feelings, pleasures, and deaths from the ink barrel. From the throat. Whether or not this journey culminates onstage is separate, although sister, to the private uncovering of oneself through poetic language. How does one's writing practice transform when one pair of eyes, one encouraging tongue, beckons they set themself free? How does one reconcile the relationship between the written word and their embodied emotions upon witnessing a Winterfat Reading Room? The preparation and "aftercare" are equally critical to the performance itself. Our community outreach staff is only one, but a powerful part of our nurturing ecosystem; the inviter.

VISUAL DESIGN AND HANDHELD ENVIRONMENT

Commitment to visual beauty is a way to honor the well-being of one's environment. Our art editors approach the role of the artist as one of homemaking. Decorating and commemorating collective space, creating offerings and keepsakes, crafting visual language to invite the fullest possible personal expression. It is rare to find spaces that truly welcome embodied expression. The purpose of visual art in Winterfat's mission is to bless, dedicate, and sanctify space. Whether in a room or on paper, Winterfat's home will be beautiful. Firstly, to honor its origin: the earth. And secondly, to offer tender invitations to our community. At Winterfat, we aim to be good hosts.

Winterfat graciously values the words provided to it, both spoken and written, from its community. All forms of communication are a condition of translation and interpretation. There is a distinct power all communicators hold in the ways their words engage on the page. Matters of kern, italics, bold, size, and spacing are micro-representations of distinctive consideration. With the goal of crafting corporeal and handheld materials that represent the spatial and physical embodiment present in our reading rooms, *Winterfat Literary Magazine* attempts to maintain the authorial choices taken by our readers as paramount for translating the greater ethos of our collective: the full, complete, embodiment of one's erotic autonomy. The author precedes the words as their embodied experience precedes how it is expressed. Our magazine emphasizes the effort of not allowing the collective's identity to precede or erase the authorship of those we select and invite.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND EXPERIENCED ENVIRONMENT

In pursuit of dignity, Winterfat Presse creates spaces for spoken word poetry; spaces for writers, and for people who do not consider themselves poets, all the same. We find that the open mic portion is equally as important as selected readers, and both serve a different purpose and need to be facilitated differently. Both are uncertain, as physical environments are unpredictable, but our event host serves as a facilitator for this embodiment, guiding the readers and room to stay in flow and communion with one another throughout the evening. This looks like maintaining focus throughout the evening with shared editorial and community goals in mind, also working alongside the venue's constraints. Our hosts and team are entrusted with the pacing and energy of the event, to introduce and guide the audience further into their bodies.

So often we are asked to look outside of ourselves, to erase personal sensibility for the sake of Western ethics; being pleasant and placid as to not upset or disrupt structures or the 'sanctity' that comes from the erasure of our erotic power—the erotic as understood by Audre Lorde, her essay *Uses of the Erotic* also serving as a foundational Winterfat text—but self-experience and spaces for such are disruptive. These spaces do not subscribe to 'pleasantries of expression' that maintain the status quo; they are created for you to profoundly experience your personal sensibility: "And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible…" (*Uses of the Erotic*) We believe that once you have sensed it, you cannot ignore what it demands from you. It only takes one submergence into your self-experience to know it's worth fighting for. We create space for this deep and necessary recognition to occur.

Feeling as truth is what Winterfat Presse focuses on, found to be a guiding force, a beacon lighting a new path to creativity, and a guidebook on how to live life. That is, to resist, to demand more, to understand how resistance is sustained, and how we dream of new realities to fight for: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives." (*Uses of the Erotic*) Self-expression is not only actualizing and comforting in self-understanding, but to 'arrive,' to become 'real.'

AUDRE LORDE'S 'EROTIC'

"The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honour and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves." (*Uses of the Erotic*)

Expressed with the utmost eloquence and beauty, Audre Lorde's essay and speech, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, is foundational for Winterfat, fundamentally informing our focus on embodiment and directing our goals at creating a world where intuition is standard, and the body's revelations are treated as inalienable truths (rather than fear): "For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing." (Lorde) In each and every one of us, there is an endless well of imagination, only needing the slightest communication to awaken, only needing the tiniest provocation; witnessing of possibility. Perhaps curiosity is the ignition; perhaps it is a moment when our intuition demands 'yes,' and we do not know how to pursue our pleasure, our hope, our dream. Winterfat's team relies on the body as a resource, and in this, we remain quite aware of what lives within it and what that emergence could evoke. The erotic does not mean ease or comfort, but it does insist on truth and clarity. It demands our attention and care, to be tended to—with this intention, it can propel us.

Winterfat Reading Room's first iteration was in honor of Audre Lorde, on the theme of Intuition as Resistance, surrounding "the considered phrase, "It feels right to me," [which] acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding." (Lorde) The truth of our lives, becoming our feelings and the profound sensations, is what will catapult us into change and sustainable revolution. In our mere bodies, there is an endless reminder of what we are fighting for when we talk about change. The very experience of receiving a 'yes' or 'no' from within ourselves is enough to demand more from the world around us. In connection with our deep intuitions, we are able to imagine a world where there is room for such as a propeller and foundational force of our existence and society. What would the world look like if we all responded to uncertainty by engaging our intuition, rather than attempting to create isolatory structures that 'made sense,' aka meaning operating with the status quo and what is proposed as sensible and humane? Because "the principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need…" is proposed to all of us as principles to aspire to.

Winterfat Reading Room creates a home for the body to return to intuition, following Audre Lorde's guidance on the matter: "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial." We become able to see what we are fighting for, which is a life of feeling and possibility for change; for the abstract to be something to aspire to nurture and mesh with, not fear or reject. Those in power are terrified of uncertainty, and that is why structures were created: to dissolve and dissipate that unease. But uncertainty is inextricable from this life. The erotic provides a resource to harness it. With Audre Lorde's erotic and set of directive empowerments, we access a strength like no other: that from the body in conversation with its immateriality, a life of fulfillment from creation, and a space to share that with others.

RESOURCES

1. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

2. The Free Black Women's Library—*a social art project that features a collection of over 5000 books written by Black women and Black non-binary writers.* (226 Marcus Garvey Blvd, Brooklyn, NY 11221)

3. Outreach Services at Brooklyn Public Library—*services for immigrants, older adults, people experiencing homelessness, community health, and those transitioning in and out of correctional systems.* (www.bklynlibrary.org/outreach)

4. Bedford-Stuyvesant Food Share—*distributes outside of Herbert Von King (on the northwest corner, of Lafayette and Marcy) every Saturday afternoon at 3 pm.* (communitysolidarity.org/foodshares/bedstuy)

5. Ubu—*web archive of art, poetry, film, and audio.* (ubu.com)

6. The People's Forum—*educational and cultural space for political and collective action.* (320 W 37th St, New York, NY 10018)

7. Shape Up NYC—*free fitness programs through NYC parks.* (www.nycgovparks.org/events/shape-up-nyc)

8. Culture Pass—*free admission with a library card to NYC cultural institutions.(*www.culturepass.nyc)

9. The Word Is Change—*bookstore in Bed-Stuy.* (368 Tompkins Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11216)

ANDI GUNTHER (Founder/Editor-in-Chief) is a poet, instructor, and community arts organizer who writes as a form of self-translation, exploring the body as an archive and threshold. Their poetry is a series of negotiations with grief, sexuality, language, and God; with the self as something intermittently inhabitable.
Andi is the founder and editor-in-chief of Winterfat Presse, a feminist poetry collective, reading room, and publication based in New York City. They live between Brooklyn and Berlin, and hold a BFA in Writing from Pratt Institute.

EMIL BYUN (Stage Manager) is a New Haven/Brooklyn based designer working in contemporary performance and sculpture. Her practice centers on spatial storytelling and explores how designed environments can act as living collaborators to shape narrative rather than simply framing a stage. Emil values process driven, hands-on making and serves to uphold poetic experimentation to help others connect to their voice. As the Stage Manager for Winterfat Presse, she designs adaptable backdrops that renegotiate and elevate given space.

NYA MORGAN (Outreach Coordinator) is a writer, filmmaker, and linguistic traveler born in Washington, DC and based in Brooklyn. She creates with a self-reflexive candor, beckoning audiences into her emotional body with her use of diaristic prose and materials from her decades spanning personal archive.

By recirculating dissident narratives through Winterfat Presse, Nya seeks to expand upon the wisdom of her Black and Brown literary foremothers, nurturing a collective whose work bridges contemporary ideas of embodiment, lesbian identity, abjection, and intersectionality with the recorded revelations of the pioneering female writers who birthed her.

LUCILLE LINDBERG (Art Editor) is a visual artist and poet based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work pursues ritual connectivity by exchanging intimacies like dreams and tattoos, employing a restless, automatically guided hand to build worlds from embodied intuition. As art editor for Winterfat Presse she is interested in building a visual vocabulary to aid the magazine in its fullest expression, following the symbolic languages of plant medicine and weaving practices as guides toward transformation and community.

SHAKORI CARPENTER (Magazine Editor) is a being that seeks to make physical, digital, and mythical conditions make sense simultaneously. Equipped with an architecture degree, Black Southern heritage, and a slew of personae, they work to continually reiterate systematic notions of a seemingly singular binary existence. Exercising the mind through writing and digio-physical performances, Shakori's work examines a range of materials across history, culture, gender, race, design, media, algorithms, and hardware to commune with current "ways that are" as a means of invigorating "ways that can be."

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